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POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE WAR¹

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The pathology of political parties is illustrated under especially illuminating circumstances during time of war. The internal political conditions of every important nation are influenced to some extent by its external relations. War on a world-wide scale is the external relation which has the most profound influence upon the internal political conditions of every participating nation. This influence varies in different cases, depending upon the proximity of the particular nation to the scene of the conflict, the extent of its participation, the relative danger of invasion by its enemies, the character of the internal governmental organization, the length of the conflict, and other factors. In normal times, it has been found by experience in nations operating under the two-party system that oscillations in the fortunes of the two principal parties occur with a surprising degree of regularity. This see-saw of party politics may have an injurious effect upon the continuity and constructiveness of the nation's foreign policy even in normal times; its continuation in time of war when the nation's fate may be hanging in the balance would be a serious, if not intolerable, danger. One effect of war upon the party system, therefore, is to bring about, at least for a time, a relatively greater stability of party control, if not complete quiescence of partisanship, either through coalition or through cessation of party opposition, or both. In normal times ordinary party opposition to the administration or to the government, as used in the British sense, may be considered not only

¹ This is an expansion of an article with the same title which is to appear in the new edition of the *Encyclopedia Americana*. In the preparation of this article, the author has derived much assistance from J. A. Fairlie's "British War Cabinets," *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. XVI, May, 1918.

as not unpatriotic, but as a positive indication of a healthy and vigorous political life. With the advent of war, however, this view must naturally be subject to considerable modification.

When the first wave of excitement sweeps over the country at the outbreak of war, party struggles and contests may for a time seem to be almost entirely forgotten. The administration will not usually allow the country, if it can be avoided, to be brought to the brink of war unless convinced that the great majority of the people believe the war to be a just one. Under such circumstances, it seldom happens that any party with a considerable following either wishes to or can afford to oppose the entrance of the country into the war. The fortunes of political parties depend to a large extent upon the popularity of the principles which they espouse, as indicated by their platforms and by the character of the men whom they nominate for office. The principles advocated by the political parties are determined in accordance with their respective points of view or reactions toward the leading questions or issues of a public character with which the country is confronted, among which that of war is, of course, one of the most striking and important.

But while there may be practical unanimity upon the question of entering the war, there is more likelihood of a difference developing in the reaction of the parties toward the questions involved in the method of prosecuting it and of terminating it. Upon these questions relating to the war, political parties are likely to take different attitudes and to endeavor to attempt to carry out the policies which they respectively support through securing control of the government and the administration of affairs.

There are difficulties, however, in the assumption by political parties of different attitudes toward questions of war which do not arise to the same extent in connection with their division over questions of domestic policy. The principal issues upon which political parties have divided in the United States, during most of our history, have been those of a domestic or internal character. This has been due largely to our geographical isolation and lack of proximity to powerful or troublesome neighbors.

There has, on the whole, been little attention paid to questions of foreign relations and little popular understanding of such questions; and political parties have consequently, during most of our history, subordinated such questions in their platforms to those of domestic policy. Thus, in time of war, partisan politics becomes comparatively quiescent because the issues upon which parties divide are usually domestic questions; while in war questions of foreign policy and international import become paramount, and these, being new and little understood by the mass of the voters, allow little opportunity for the appearance of decided party cleavage.

At the same time questions of foreign relations which affect our vital interest as intimately as does war cannot well be ignored by the political parties. Upon a question of foreign war, however, there is usually a much greater approach to popular unity and unanimity of public opinion than upon questions of domestic policy. Many persons subscribe to the view that party politics should stop at the water's edge and that, in case of war, it is the duty of every good citizen to support his country, whether right or wrong. It is true that, both in the War of 1812 and in the Mexican War, there was considerable dissatisfaction in certain sections of the country with the war policy of the government, although there was less apparent difference of opinion over these wars than over equally important questions of domestic policy. It may also be noted that the opposition of the Federalist party to the War of 1812 contributed largely to the demise of that party.

Another difficulty in the way of injecting party politics into the conduct of war is, as already intimated, the necessity for continuity of policy and stability of government if the war is to be brought to a successful conclusion. A government's foreign policy, in order to be permanent and constructive, should not be made the plaything of party politics, and this is especially true of war. The see-saw and ups-and-downs of party change which may be the evidences of the healthy fluctuations of public opinion in time of peace become dangerous in time of war. Prompt and decisive action is necessary in the emergency in order to provide for the safety of the state.

For this reason, the party in power during the existence of war usually appeals for the support of the voters in order that a continuous policy and a united front may be presented to the enemy. The reflection of President Lincoln in 1864 was advocated on the ground that it was unwise "to swap horses while crossing a stream." Appeals were also made to the voters on this ground by leaders and supporters of the party in power in 1898 to elect a Congress composed of a majority of members of that party, although the Spanish-American War was then practically over.

In Great Britain it is possible to postpone a general election by mutual consent during time of war, and thus avoid presenting the voters the opportunity of swapping horses. Under the plan of astronomical government which we have in the United States, however, elections come regularly at stated intervals regardless of whether the country is at war or peace. For this reason, some sort of a party contest even during time of war is practically unavoidable. Moreover, on account of the organization of our national, state, and local governments generally in accordance with the principle of separation of powers, as well as on account of the numerous elections and the large number of elective officers, it is necessary for political parties in the United States to maintain stronger and more permanent organizations than are required in other countries. Although a truce between the parties may be arranged at the outbreak of war, it is likely to be of short duration and to be broken as soon as party exigencies demand it, at the approach of an important election. At such a time the opposition party cannot expect to maintain its organization intact unless it makes a contest to secure control of the offices wherever there is a fair chance of success. Under these circumstances, the necessity apparently rests upon the leaders of the opposition party to find issues and to carry the contest to the polls, in spite of the existence of war and in spite of the fact that a considerable percentage of the rank and file of both parties is enrolled in the armies at the front and unable to participate in the election.

The world war has reacted somewhat differently upon political parties in European parliamentary governments than upon

those in the United States. From one point of view the British cabinet is, in ordinary times, a party committee. It is a body of politicians selected from the leaders of the majority party, rather than a body of nonpartisan technical experts; it is a parliamentary committee holding secret sessions and collectively responsible to the house of commons. At the outbreak of the war it consisted of an unwieldy body of more than twenty members. The war, however, wrought fundamental changes in its character. At the very outset a party truce was agreed to, followed some time afterwards by the creation of a coalition cabinet of about the same number of members, containing practically all the prominent leaders of the two major parties, and one leader of the Labor party, but with a nonpartisan technical expert, Lord Kitchener, in charge of the war office. The formation of the coalition cabinet sealed the party truce, and indicated a significant departure, at least temporarily, from the ordinary plan of party control and responsibility.

Certain other changes also followed in the train of the coalition cabinet. The cabinet ceased to be a mere parliamentary committee and less attention began to be paid to proceedings in Parliament, inasmuch as the latter ceased to affect or control the policies and personnel of the cabinet. The responsibility of the cabinet was rather to the electorate than to the house of commons. In view of the remoteness of a general election, even this responsibility was feeble. That this responsibility, such as it was, had become individual rather than collective was indicated by the resignation in 1917 of the secretary of state for India without affecting the tenure of office of the other members. Under these circumstances, the necessity for holding general elections ceased and acts were passed from time to time postponing the elections by prolonging the duration of the house of commons.

The British coalition cabinet proved unsatisfactory, however, largely because of its unwieldy size; and smaller committees, selected partly from the cabinet and partly from outside, were appointed to supervise particular phases of the administration. One of these committees was the war committee, which subsequently developed into the war cabinet of five members with

Mr. Lloyd George at its head. The war cabinet, however, differed from the war committee in that the latter was a mere committee of, and subordinate to, the large cabinet, while the war cabinet was a small compact group of leaders of the Liberal, Unionist and Labor parties superior to the ministry. For the most part, the members of the war cabinet were not burdened with the duties of administrative office, so that they could devote their whole attention to general matters connected with the war. The war cabinet was a manifest improvement over the cumbrous coalition cabinet, but even the war cabinet lacked the advantages which come from the concentrated power and responsibility of a single controlling head, such as we have in the United States.²

The war cabinet under Lloyd George's premiership was, as indicated, a coalition cabinet. Upon the formation of this cabinet, Asquith, the leader of the old-line Liberals, and some of his supporters, retired from office and took seats on the opposition side of the house of commons. This reappearance of an opposition, however, was at first formal rather than real; for the former Liberal premier and his followers, though speaking in opposition to government measures, refrained from voting against them. The party truce still remained in effect. Even at this time it would appear that more dissatisfaction with the government was felt than was openly manifested.

With the further continuation of the war, this dissatisfaction became more open and articulate. This was evidenced in part by the growth of the Sinn Fein movement among the Irish outside of Ulster, who, no longer satisfied with the prospect of home rule, were demanding complete independence. Not only in Ireland, however, but also in England, there was growing dissatisfaction, especially among the members of the Labor party, with the restrictions on individual liberty resulting from the Defense of the Realm Act and other acts.³ The members of the Labor

² A. V. Dicey, in *The Nineteenth Century*, January, 1919.

³ It is a noteworthy fact that, both in Great Britain and in the United States, the party in power at the outbreak of the war was the party which had stood more strongly against state interference with individual liberty than its principal opponent, but that, in both cases, the successful prosecution of the war necessitated the abandonment of this time-honored policy.

party were also dissatisfied with the expressed war aims of the government both in their international and domestic bearings, with special reference to the position of labor after the war. During the last year of the war, the growing opposition of the Labor party to the government was shown by the action of the local organizations of the party in supporting labor candidates against those of the Coalition at by-elections. In June, 1918, a Labor party conference was held at which a resolution declaring that "the existence of the political truce should be no longer recognized" was adopted by a large majority. Although the adoption of this resolution did not involve the immediate resignation of the Labor members of the government, it was bound in time to render their positions untenable and thus to disrupt the coalition as far as the Labor party was concerned, or else to reduce them to the necessity of breaking away from their party, which some of them ultimately did. The Asquith Liberals could also be counted upon, when opportunity offered, to assume a real opposition to the Coalition.

Promptly after the signing of the armistice in November came the dissolution of Parliament and a general election in December. These important developments came so quickly that the various elements opposing the Coalition did not have time to make their opposition effective at the election. The Lloyd George Coalition received a new lease of power by an overwhelming majority in the commons, though the popular vote was not so striking. Among the causes of this result seem to have been the following: (1) the split in the Labor party, as evidenced by the adherence of some of its prominent leaders to the Coalition; (2) the reaction from the strain of war and the temporary good feeling resulting from the glamor of victory weakened the opposition to the government; (3) the failure on the part of the Asquith Liberals to present to the voters any constructive program on questions of peace conditions and international relations different from those advanced by the Coalition; and (4) the widespread feeling that the problems of reconstruction could be more safely handled by the government which had brought the war to a successful conclusion.

Turning to France, we find that cabinet changes during the war have been more frequent than in Great Britain. Nevertheless some of the same tendencies in the relations of political parties may be observed. Coalition cabinets have been usual in France, on account of the number of parties and the absence of any clear party majority. The cabinet in office at the beginning of the war was reorganized within a few weeks on a broader basis, including representatives of the anti-military Socialists. In October, 1915, a more sweeping reorganization took place, and a new comprehensive cabinet was formed, with M. Briand as president of the council, including six former premiers and a total of twenty-three members, representing all party elements, even the clerical and conservative group. This cabinet was somewhat recast and reduced in December, 1916, and more extensive changes were made in March, 1917, when M. Ribot became premier. In August, 1917, during the Ribot ministry, the Socialists in the chamber of deputies for the first time failed to coöperate with the other party groups in giving the government a vote of confidence. Owing to the weakness of the Socialists, this did not lead immediately to a crisis; but, as criticism continued to develop, Ribot resigned a month later. Following the short-lived Painlevé ministry, which M. Thomas, the Socialist deputy, declined to enter, another cabinet was formed in November, 1917, with M. Clemenceau as premier and composed principally of Radicals and Republicans of the Left, but from which the Independent Socialists as well as the Conservatives and Royalists were omitted, so as to secure a more harmonious group.

Thus, both in Great Britain and in France, the tendency has been at first towards a policy of "comprehension," embracing practically all political parties in the government. But this in turn has been followed by the reappearance of political divisions; and while the government remains a coalition of different elements, distinct opposition parties have been revived.

We may now contrast the developments in the United States with those in Great Britain and France. In November, 1917,

Premier Lloyd George declared that he was almost the only minister in any land on either side who had been in office since the beginning of the war. Practically all the others had fallen by the wayside through one cause or another. This was not true, however, in the United States. A few months after the reelection of President Wilson in 1916, many votes being undoubtedly cast for him on the ground that he had kept us out of war, he found himself unable longer to preserve peace and at the same time maintain the national honor and self-respect. The entrance of the United States into the war, however, produced no cabinet crisis as it had in England. The same cabinet which had served in time of peace continued to serve without change after a state of war had been declared.

At the same time, active party opposition to the main policies of the administration practically disappeared for a period; while in the conduct of public affairs, many men outside the administration party were called into service, including a number of leading Republicans.

A demand arose from certain leaders and organs of the opposition party that, following the example of Great Britain, a coalition cabinet should be formed, but the demand was unheeded. The opposition to the President's conduct of the war culminated in the attempt to secure the enactment of what was known as the Chamberlain war cabinet bill, providing for the appointment of a war cabinet "of three distinguished citizens of demonstrated executive ability," which should practically take the conduct of the war out of the hands of the President and usurp his constitutional functions as commander-in-chief of the military forces. This bill as proposed would probably have complicated the situation rather than simplified it, and was clearly unconstitutional. Yet it was supported on the ground that such a war cabinet had been established in Great Britain with resulting increased efficiency in war administration, and we should consequently profit by her example. Such an argument, however, failed to take into account fundamental differences in the forms of the two governments. The Overman bill, which was finally enacted instead of the Chamberlain bill and gave the Presi-

dent power to coordinate and consolidate the scattered administrative agencies, was much more in harmony with the form and spirit of our institutions. The President neither could be nor ought to be supplanted in the conduct of the war. Stability of policy and administration in time of war is more important than that the personnel of the government should change quickly and readily in accordance with the changing currents of popular opinion and the ebb and flow of partisan politics.

To secure such stability in Great Britain, a coalition cabinet was deemed necessary in order to avoid partisan criticism and struggle which might otherwise cause the downfall of the government through the loss of confidence in it by the house of commons or by the electorate. No such coalition was necessary in the United States, however, since the cabinet officers are not responsible to Congress and are in no danger of an upset so long as they retain the confidence of the President, who is not only the head of the administration but also the leader of his party, and whose tenure of office is, of course, practically secure for the period of his term. The concentrated power and stability of tenure of the President makes for such efficiency in war administration as parliamentary governments are unable to attain except by abandoning the essential principle, that is, ministerial responsibility to Parliament, on which such governments are based. The argument that, because the establishment of the British war cabinet resulted in increased efficiency, such a plan would have the same result in the United States failed to take into account the fact that the establishment of the British war cabinet was a move in the direction of concentration of executive power; while such a cabinet, if introduced in the United States, would be a move in the direction of the diffusion of such power and responsibility.

At the outbreak of war there is an immediate and almost, so to speak, instinctive tendency on the part of the government to become disengaged from those checks and hindrances which, during peace, serve to prevent hasty action and to protect the rights of the individual from the arbitrary power of the government, but which, during war, may seriously interfere with its vigorous

prosecution. This tendency takes the form of a greater concentration and energizing of executive power. Where, as in Great Britain, the governmental organization and the party organization overlap in the cabinet, the tendency in time of war toward greater concentration of governmental power is soon transmitted to the party organizations, resulting in drawing together these organizations into a coalition government. Where, on the other hand, as in the United States, such overlapping of governmental and party organizations in the cabinet does not exist in the same sense, the formation of a coalition administration does not follow as a logical necessity.

Upon the entrance of the United States into the war, a party truce of a somewhat limited character had been tacitly agreed to by the two major parties. The Socialist party alone took a decided stand against the war through the vote of its lone member in Congress and through its St. Louis platform, but the result of this stand was to cause a serious split in the party. In the nature of things, however, the party truce could be only temporary. As the summer of 1918 approached, President Wilson, in calling on the members of Congress to attend to legislation rather than to go home to mend their political fences, made use of his well-known, laconic expression: "Politics is adjourned." Politics, however, was not adjourned *sine die*, but might be reconvened in special session at the first opportunity.

This opportunity came with the approach of the congressional elections of the fall of 1918, which were the only elections of any importance held in the United States during its participation in the war. It is true that even in this election some traces of the party truce remained. In Minnesota the Democrats did not offer any formal opposition to the reelection of the loyal Republican candidate for United States senator. In New York City an agreement was reached between the leaders of the two major parties, in accordance with which each party indorsed the candidates of the other in three congressional districts. These instances, however, were exceptional and were probably due in part to the belief that the election of the candidates whom it was proposed not to oppose was, in any event, a foregone conclusion.

Party contests occurred generally in states and districts wherever there was a fair chance for the election of either candidate.

The congressional campaign of 1918 attracted on the whole, as was natural, much less public attention than usual. Until a few days before election day, war news crowded political news out of the headlines of the newspapers. Underneath the surface, however, the political pot was simmering. The case of the Democrats, in the eyes of most of the congressional leaders of that party, rested largely on the ground that, under their administration of affairs, the war was being conducted successfully. A huge army had been placed in France—an undertaking more gigantic than the country had ever before attempted, in comparison with which our efforts in the Spanish-American War were mere child's play—and yet there had been less mismanagement, inefficiency and graft than in former wars.

President Wilson's claim for the support of his policies, however, rested on a loftier plane than mere military success or efficient management in the conduct of the war. In March, the President had issued an appeal to New Jersey Democrats in which he struck the keynote of service to humanity as the aim which the party should embrace. "The days of political and economic reconstruction which are ahead of us," declared the President, "no man can now definitely assess, but we know this, that every program must be shot through and through with utter disinterestedness, that no party must try to serve itself, but every party must try to serve humanity. . . . Every program must be tested by this question and this question only: Is it just, is it for the benefit of the average man, without influence or privilege; does it embody in real fact the highest conception of social justice and of right dealing, without respect of person or class or particular interest?" That the politicians of either party were likely to measure up to such a high standard was doubtful.

The President's belief, however, in the possibility of making a distinction between the autocratic German government and the German people was not shared by some of the more prominent leaders of the Republican party, and was also viewed with considerable skepticism by many persons who were not politicians.

Former President Roosevelt went so far as to denounce President Wilson's fourteen points as thoroughly mischievous, and other Republican leaders emphatically disapproved of the President's policy in sending notes to the German government. The Republican leaders indicated their belief that the war was to be won, not through diplomatic appeals to the German people to overthrow their masters, but through the use solely of military force. This was natural, since any victory through diplomatic weapons would redound to the advantage of the administration, while a victory through military force would be more truly the work of the whole nation. They succeeded in making many people believe that the President's policy meant a peace by negotiation and conciliation instead of a peace by dictation and force, and that the Republicans were in advance of the Democrats in demanding the unconditional surrender of Germany.

President Wilson was also handicapped by the fact that there were many prominent members of his own party who were not wholly in sympathy with his policies, and, through the operation of the rule of seniority, some of these men had become chairmen of important congressional committees. He felt, nevertheless, that the Republican leaders were even more out of sympathy with his policies than the large majority of Democrats and that, by their utterances, the former had already broken the party truce. Shortly before the congressional elections, therefore, he issued a public appeal to the voters to return a Democratic majority both to the senate and the house of representatives in order to prevent "division of counsel and leadership" and to avoid the necessity which might otherwise arise of carrying on the government "amid contest and obstruction."

The President's appeal was unusual, but was salutary as bringing about a public discussion of the political aspects of the war which had been partly lost sight of in the midst of important military developments. His main reason for issuing the appeal doubtless was that the possible control by opposite parties of the executive and legislative branches respectively would create an anomalous situation—one likely to lead to difficulties if not deadlock in ordinary times, and one especially to be avoided in a

period of war and of reconstruction after the war when harmony between the executive and the legislative departments becomes even more important and desirable than usual. The election to the legislative body of a majority opposed to the executive would, in parliamentary governments, during ordinary times lead to the resignation of the executive and to the establishment of an executive of opposite political complexion in harmony with the legislature. Such a mode of procedure on the part of the executive, however, is not feasible under the American system of government, for the resignation of the President would, of course, merely place the vice-president in his office with no change of party control over the executive department. Under the circumstances, therefore, if the opposition party gains control of Congress, that party may also attempt to control the President and harmonious relations between the two branches of government become more difficult to maintain. The President is practically reduced to the alternative of refusing to submit to the dictation of Congress, which may produce a deadlock, or of attempting by persuasion and by arousing public opinion through appeals to the country, to compel Congress to carry out his recommendations. The vital importance to the President, therefore, of having a Congress in harmony with administration policies was the principal justification for the President's unusual action.

Such difficulties would have been very much lessened, of course, if it had been clear that the President and his supporters and the members of the opposition, though bearing different party labels, were substantially agreed in their attitude toward the main issues before the country. In that case, the control of the two political branches of the government by different parties would probably have been the nearest approach to coalition government that would be feasible under the existing method of organizing our government into sharply separated departments.

The early and somewhat sudden termination of hostilities through the signing of the armistice was a tribute to the efficacy of the President's diplomatic weapon, the use of which tended to gal-

vanize into life what little there remained of political opposition to the government in Germany. This opposition had been practically buried at the outbreak of the war.⁴ The Social Democrats had used fine-sounding words about the international solidarity of labor; but war, in Germany, as elsewhere, is the negation of internationalism. The Social Democrats followed the government into the war, voted for the war credits, and forgot about the solidarity of the working class. The tendency of even the radical opposition party in Germany to support the government at the outbreak of the war was due in part to fear of possible domination of foreign powers, which were believed to harbor imperialistic designs, and in part to the stern repression by the home government of any opposition which it deemed to be unpatriotic. The opposition of the radicals was also stifled in the face of common danger at the outbreak of the war, because the success of the enemy would, in their minds, result in the destruction of their own party organization under the domination of the foreign conqueror.

As the war continued, however, a rift appeared. The majority Socialists, it is true, acquiesced for the most part in the control over the conduct of the war exercised by the military leaders, supported by the Pan-Germans. The minority Socialists, however, protested vigorously against the Brest-Litovsk treaty as a violation of the Reichstag resolution proclaiming the policy of "no annexations, no indemnities;" but their opposition was ineffectual and their own influence declined with the apparent success of the war policy of the military leaders. The significance of President Wilson's policy, after the downfall of the Tsar, in holding out to the Germans a democratic peace program lay in the fact that it tended to strengthen the political opposition in Germany to the Kaiser's government, the imperialistic character of which became more clearly revealed by contrast with the democratic professions of the Allies, under the leadership of Wilson.

⁴ Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, p. 393. The chapter of this book on "Political Parties in War Time," though brief, is a philosophical and illuminating discussion of the subject.

In spite of the success of the President's diplomatic policy which, indeed, was not yet perfectly apparent at the date of the congressional elections, his appeal to the voters was not sufficiently efficacious to save his party from defeat. The resulting likelihood that a conflict between the President and Congress would occur was foreshadowed by the passage by the Republican senatorial caucus, shortly after the election, of a resolution declaring that "Congress should assert and exercise its normal and constitutional functions, including legislation necessary for reconstruction." Although whatever wisdom may be contained in Congress should undoubtedly be brought to bear to assist in the solution of the complicated tasks of reconstruction, it should not be brought to bear with that degree of partisan spirit which might be unobjectionable in times of profound peace. The end of the war tends to release some of those springs of thought and action which result in the renewal of party opposition and conflict. It is obvious, however, that the effects of the war have not run their course with the mere cessation of hostilities nor even with the ratification of the definitive treaty of peace. War is a great technical enterprise, and, in the nature of things, there can be no Democratic or Republican way of conducting actual hostilities. Similarly, many of the processes of reconstruction are technical in character and, therefore, although the recrudescence of party politics with the return of peace is to some extent inevitable, the party truce should not be wholly abandoned during the period of reconstruction. This fact received partial recognition in Great Britain through the continuation of the coalition government at the general election. It has also received a partial recognition in the United States in the attitude of some of the leading men of both parties in regarding as a nonpartisan issue the proposal for international reconstruction through a league of nations.